

21.05.11

**6 Senator S.W. Pallett of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding staffing levels within the radiography department (OQ.110/2021)**

Will the Minister advise whether the current staffing levels within the Radiography Department at the General Hospital are sufficient to maintain all required radiography services to the public at present? Will he also provide the number of vacant posts within this department, together with an explanation for any such vacancies, especially where any have arisen as a result of disciplinary issues?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):**

There has been a longstanding recruitment challenge within this area due to the scarcity of specialist skills. Currently there are 10 vacancies from a budgeted workforce of 51 full-time employees. These vacancies are currently covered by locum staff to ensure the safe delivery of the service. Health and Community Services has recently started the recruitment campaign to all of those 10 vacancies in an effort to secure candidates for all the posts. This campaign will be supported by a specialist recruitment consultant employed by the Government as part of the Government contract on resourcing. We are also in the process of conducting a review into the best means of retaining this staff group, acknowledging that it is not just in Jersey but elsewhere recruitment challenges to it.

**2.6.1 Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Just a couple of issues around the actual question itself. I did ask whether there is an explanation for the vacancies and to some extent the Minister has given that. But he has not really given a full explanation and also were there any that have arisen out of recent disciplinary issues?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

As Minister, it is not appropriate for me to comment on disciplinary matters within the department, which indeed are dealt with by professionals under the supervision of the States Employment Board. I think that is the most I can say on disciplinary issues. But on the remainder, there is always recruitment of staff in any organisation. It is dependent on the availability of skills. As I have said, approximately one-fifth of the posts here are currently covered by locum staff, so the service is continuing.

**2.6.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Could the Minister inform Members how many of these radiographer posts are filled by agency radiographers and how this compares with the current use of agency workers in nursing?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

As I advised in my answer to Senator Pallett, the 10 vacancies are currently covered by locum staff. I understand from that, that the remaining 41 positions are filled by staff employed on a substantive basis by the department. As to the wider comparisons, we are reducing the number of agency staff within the department, but I cannot give the Deputy a department-wide picture at the moment, but work is continually ongoing in ensuring that staff are employed substantively.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

What is happening there?

**The Bailiff:**

There seems to be some sort of echo. Does anyone within the Assembly have their microphone switched on? Perhaps you could try that ...

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

I will start again.

**The Bailiff:**

Yes, please.

**2.6.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Agency workers; can he produce those figures and particularly how this department's figures for the use of agency workers across the 50 places compares to current nursing practice? Can he give those figures to me as soon as he wishes?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I will do. It is rather expanding on the question, which was limited to the Radiography Department, but the Deputy wishes to know the use of agency staff. Perhaps he would tell me, as he has mentioned nursing services, does he just wish to know about nursing or does he wish to know about medical staff? Does he wish to know across the whole H.C.S. Department?

**The Bailiff:**

Minister, I am afraid there is not a facility to ask a question back and that was the Deputy's second or supplementary question, so perhaps that could be taken into the margins of the Assembly and the Deputy could clarify his question, which is to be answered on a later date in any event offline.

**2.6.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

The Minister does not want to talk about disciplinary matters and I can understand that, but will the Minister acknowledge that there has been discontent within the department and that personality conflicts have been part of the problem and there needs to be a look at the management of the department?

[11:15]

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

In a huge department such as H.C.S. - and any huge organisations - normally there will be those sorts of tensions, but you look to proper management and procedures to deal with those and help people resolve those sorts of questions. That is role of the States Employment Board and officers. I am confident that there are measures in place to help staff navigate those difficulties and to minimise the effect of them.

**2.6.5 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

I would ask the Minister to speak with the States Employment Board and look at how effective those mechanisms are to make sure that the discontent and the problems in a department such as this are properly addressed. Will the Minister consult with the chairman of the S.E.B. (States Employment Board) and look at it in much more depth before coming to an answer?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I will do. I think the Deputy feels he has some specific information which he is not satisfied has been handled correctly, so if he wished to let me have what he knows, I can then consult on a much more informed basis.

#### **2.6.6 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

The discontent appears to be a failure of management, and given the reputation for dealing with complaints and so on in health over the 20 years I have been in the States, does the Minister not think that it is a matter of urgency to investigate this thoroughly?

#### **The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I can begin by saying that we have an excellent workforce in H.C.S., who are dedicated to their roles and work well together and with management. I am proud of our workforce and the service it gives. Of course there will be relationship difficulties within any large workforce so these things must be addressed and they are addressed within the procedures that I outlined. Anyone who has a grievance can take that up and it can be followed through and the matter resolved. Those systems are in place and are regularly used and because they are used, because they are in place, it should not be thought that a particular department or organisation is riddled with dissatisfaction.

#### **2.6.7 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

Given the fact that the Auditor General felt it essential to have a new complaints procedure and given the fact that I think probably the Alwitry case is just now coming to an end, something like 10 years since it started, does the Minister not realise that it is absolutely essential to improve the management so that these difficulties do not arise?

#### **The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

What I will say is that I acknowledge that in the past the complaints service in H.C.S., and probably within other States departments, left something to be desired, but there has been a tremendous amount of work that has gone in over recent years, since the report the Senator refers to, which has improved the complaints services and means that we are now in H.C.S. patient-centred; we seek to resolve the issues and learn from any complaints that are made. There is always room for improvement, always room to do better, but I have seen the progress that has been made in dealing with complaints.

#### **2.6.8 Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Whether the Minister wants to accept it or not, there have been issues with the Radiography Department and I would ask the Minister to have a closer look just to ensure that everything is being done to ensure that the department can run as smoothly as possible. But in terms of the numbers of vacancies, 20 per cent seems to be very high. Locums and support staff are very expensive. Could he just say what he is specifically doing to attract staff to specialist posts in areas such as radiography and more generally within H.C.S. so that we can reduce some of these high vacancy rates?

#### **The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

We have a stance what is called "always on", so I do not run a campaign which opens on one day and might close some weeks later to recruit staff. We are always on. Those adverts and that publicity is always there. It is a continual recruitment process. In addition, rather than just relying on our own skills within the department around recruitment, we are supported by specialist recruitment consultants - the name is Penna - who are contracted by the Government and they have

availability of particular expertise or reach into those radiography and other professionals in order to attract them to our posts. That is working and I expect it will be working as we recruit to these radiography positions.